

# Scratch Pad 59

April 2005

*Thank you, fandom!*



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A fanzine based on *\*brg\** 41, for the **April 2005** mailing of ANZAPA by **Bruce Gillespie**, 5 Howard Street, Greensborough VIC 3088, Australia. Phone: 61-3-9435 7786. Email: gandc@mira.net. Weblog: www.appleblossomblues.blogspot.com

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## A letter from Australia

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**Arnie Katz writes in *Vegas Weekly Fandom 18*: 'Bruce Gillespie, feted by Vegas Fandom at the Gillespie Gala & Hardin Birthday Bash, sent this letter from the calm and safety of his Australian home.'**

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Hello, everybody:

Thanks to all those who contributed to the BBB Fund and welcomed me to America. But that flight back was a horror (14 hours in a plane without an empty seat) and I was very glad to see Elaine at the gate at Tullamarine this morning at 9.30.

Impossible to summarise any impressions at the moment, except that the whole trip was amazing and satisfying to me. Whether you got your value from the delivered Gillespie bundle is up to you to decide. I put faces to many people who were good friends in print, and swore undying affection to many great friends I thought I knew already.

Thanks in particular for Janice Murray and Alan Rosenthal (and Bob and Bonnie) for putting up with me in Seattle, and similar privileges from Art Widner (and Olivia) in Gualala, Charles Brown in San Francisco, and the Newton family, and Lee and Barry Gold, in Los Angeles — and to Bob Speray, Marci Malinowycz, and Billy Pettit for driving me through parts of the great North American continent. Thanks also, for many other great road expeditions, to Janice Murray, Alan Rosenthal, Marty Cantor, and Lee and Barry Gold, and others I might have forgotten to mention.

Triumphs include being elected President of the Fan Writers of America 2004, being shown the Sea Ranch Chapel at Gualala (surely the world's most beautiful small building) by Art Widner, crossing the Mojave Desert with Billy Pettit to sit in the same room as Joyce and Arnie Katz, winning \$14 on my only slot machine game at Las Vegas, being introduced to the Japanese

Garden at the Huntingdon Museum by Marty Cantor, being allowed to touch choice items in the Robert Lichtman fanzine collection, sampling a good number of America's restaurant cuisines, and being supported way past the call of fannish duty by the great Peter Weston.

It was all Marty Cantor's fault — or was it Joyce and Arnie Katz's suggestion in the first place (at the 2004 Corflu)? Fannish history is already debating this matter. The kindly presence of Joyce and Arnie hovered over all proceedings, but their efforts for the fund were only made complete when finally we met. Robert Lichtman put in a great effort, both as a friend and the person who made sure that I survived America financially. I was always conscious of the mighty effort Bill Wright put into the Fund. Thanks to Bruce Townley for buying a con membership — I never did get to take you to dinner, Bruce.

Thanks to Art Widner for buying my other con membership — and Art wouldn't let me take him to dinner. Thanks to Irwin for editing *The Incomplete Bruce Gillespie*, of which I could sell only one copy in America. There are plenty of copies left.

Apologies to all who will only get their thank-yous in the Trip Report. I took some crappy photos myself, but I do need contributions of good photos of Corflu and Potlatch, and indeed, any good photos anybody took of any part of the expedition. I don't even have any good photos of Janice and Alan.

Much love from  
Bruce Gillespie



Earl Kemp, Bill Burns, Bruce Gillespie, Bob Speray, and Peter Weston, photographed by a passing tourist at Koit Tower, at the beginning of our whirlwind tour of the tourist high spots of San Francisco.

Sea Ranch Chapel, Gualala, California. (Photo downloaded from the Web.)



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# I have returned!

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I've been to America, and have returned. I had a lot of fun, and survived the plane trip home. My thank-you note to fandom, written on 13 March, the day I arrived home, is reprinted on page 2.

I can't publish my Trip Report here. It's copyright by the BBB (Bring Bruce Bayside (Fund)), although I haven't written it yet. It goes free to the One Per Centers, those people who donated at least \$25 (US or Australian) to the fund, and extra copies will be offered at \$10 each, first to people we know bought *The Incomplete Bruce Gillespie*, and then to anybody else interested.

Returning home has been an odd experience. For a week I had dreams about strenuous efforts to get on or off planes or trains or in or out of cars at the right time and the right place. I would fall asleep during the day — often — then wake up not knowing where I was for a moment. I finally managed the energy to put away the stuff I had acquired during the trip (but one box of books has still not arrived from Seattle), then start on a piece of Paying Work that my most regular client had sent my way.

But I still haven't decided what to do with the rest of my life. The BBB Trip has not helped a bit in the

perpetual effort to publish fanzines. Any money left over after all Trip expenses have been accounted for will be donated to various fan causes. That still leaves me skint when trying to do the next *SF Commentary* as a print fanzine. I haven't even posted out most of the print copies of *Steam Engine Time* 4. Yes, I will continue to place the electronic versions of my magazines on efanzines.com (vote for Bill Burns for Website Hugo, 2005!), but that doesn't help readers who don't have access to efanzines.com.

Meanwhile, the assembled multitude of fanzine fandom (at Corflu) awarded me their highest honour, the Immediate Past President of the Fan Writers of America 2004. Why make this a retrospective award? As Tom Becker (co-chair of Corflu) explained to me, the award thus has no duties or obligations, and you can't campaign for it. It's an honour to rank with being made Fan Guest of Honour at Aussiecon in 1999. But, as in so many of life's activities, neither award guarantees that I can keep publishing. I'll just have to resort to faith in whatever fannish ghods sustain idiot fans, and keep typing as fast as I can.

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# Another cup of coffee before I sleep

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One of the main quests of my trip was to find the next cup of coffee.

Alan Rosenthal didn't need to be reminded of the magic powers of the morning cup of coffee. He sets his coffee machine the night before so that it begins to brew the morning coffee precisely at 7 a.m. Ever the gentleman, Alan even left a spare cup of coffee warm for me after he had set off for work.

Ever the klutz, I very nearly ruined his coffee machine and the Murray-Rosenthal kitchen. The second morning I was staying at their place in Seattle, I put on coffee. A few minutes later I was horrified to hear a steady drip-drip as coffee splashed to the floor. What had I done! I soon found that I had failed to put the entry point of the coffee from the brewing spout above the container in which it was supposed to collect and stay warm. As well as I could, I cleaned the kitchen bench top and the floor, and hoped like crazy that coffee had not seeped into any of the cupboards.

How could I have been so stupid? I know I am a machine klutz, but why did I have no idea how to operate the coffee-maker? The answer did not hit me until I returned to Australia. I didn't know how to operate such a machine, because I had never seen one before. It is quite difficult to buy here a coffee-maker similar to the type I found in every kitchen in America. This standard American machine has a water container on the side. Fill the water container. Click out a panel at the top. Put in a filter paper. Put in the required number of spoons of coffee. Click in the panel. Switch on the machine. The water begins to boil, then drips onto and through the

filter paper, down into the water container. The coffee stays hot for several hours, even if you switch it off.

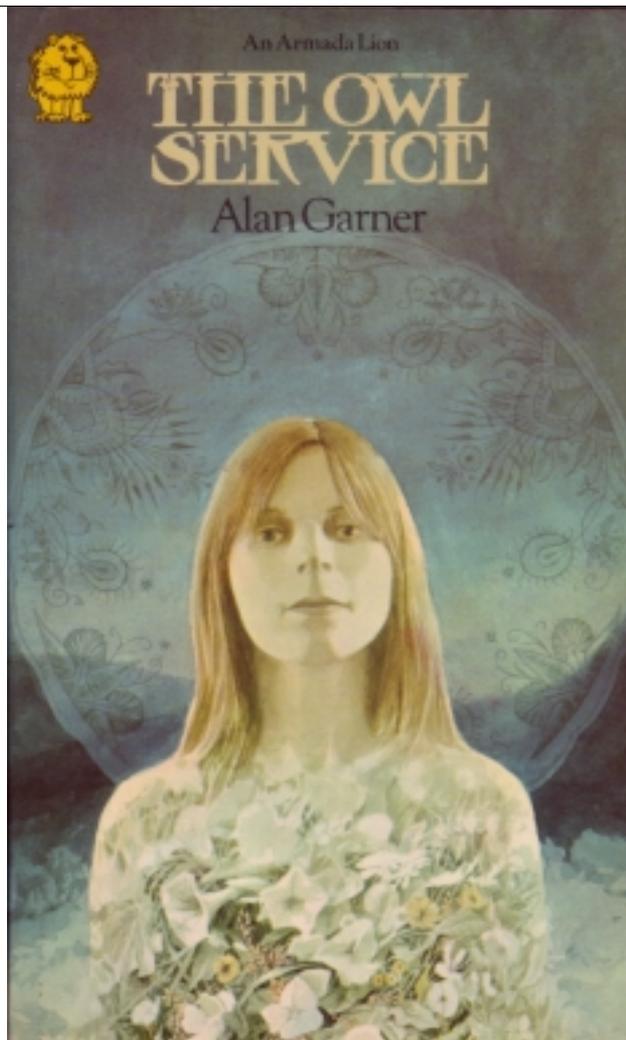
I would love to have one of these machines. The coffee tastes superb. I could make four (or however many) cups at a time. Especially after dinner.

Without coffee, I cannot sleep well. My difficulty in America was gaining that last one or two cups of coffee I need before going to sleep. When I was staying with people, I simply asked for a late coffee. Americans, ever polite, allowed me that my cup of coffee at night.

At the Holiday Inn in San Francisco (where Corflu was held), my luck was in. There were coffee-making facilities in the hotel room. All I had to do was ask for extra sachets of coffee (*not decaf, please*).

My luck seemed to desert me when I moved around the corner to the Ramada for Potlatch the next weekend. As in most American hotels, the Ramada does not offer coffee-making facilities in each room. It offers a Starbucks cafe off the lobby. Not only is Starbucks coffee nearly undrinkable (except in Seattle, its home city), but this particular Starbucks closed well before I am used to retiring. I bought a bottle of instant coffee at the local mini-market. If I had to drink instant in lukewarm water from the tap, I still needed that last cup of coffee!

But again, I was saved. Potlatch had a wonderful hospitality suite throughout the convention. It provided anything any starving fan could want. Even so, I did get some puzzled looks when I began making a new brew of coffee at midnight. These weird Australians! But nobody stopped me. Let everybody else sip single malt whiskies at 1 a.m. Another cup of coffee before I sleep.



## Previously unpublished Gillespie article

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### Inner stars: The novels of Alan Garner

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[At least I *think* this article remained unpublished. I wrote it while I was the assistant editor of *The Secondary Teacher* (the weekly magazine of the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association) in 1977. It was written for that journal, but I can't remember if it appeared there, or was quietly spiked. It's never appeared in a fanzine. I can't remember whether or not it's based on the Nova Mob talk I gave about Alan Garner in 1977. In fact, I can't remember writing it. But when I was packing to move from Collingwood to Greensborough, it suddenly appeared there in the files.

It hasn't dated much, since Garner hasn't published a whole lot since 1977: just *The Stone Book Quartet*, *Strandloper*, and an occasional title that never materialises in bookshops. However, Garner has published a book of criticism since then, and my view of him might have changed greatly after 27 years. Now I'll find out by typing the article.]

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*The scene:* Institute of Contemporary Arts, London.

*The time:* An evening in February 1975.

*The happening:* A white-faced, tense man rises to give a lecture on 'Inner Time'. He looks vulnerable; giving the lecture is painful for him. The audience listens intently,

a bit embarrassed.

*The words:* 'The feeling is less that I choose the myth than that the myth chooses me; less that I write than that I am written . . . I simply plot the maps of inner stars.'

*The writer:* Alan Garner, author of five novels, several other books, two operas and several television plays.

*New label?:* 'Magic fiction' writer; English novelist.

### So who are children these days?

Let's get rid of the label first. In his now-famous ICA lecture (published in *Science Fiction at Large*, edited by Peter Nicholls), Alan Garner does not talk about himself as a writer for children. Yet all his books have been published as 'children's books'. He has even been credited with revolutionising the genre. Labels stick, even when Alan Garner goes beyond them.

Garner's first two books, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960) and *The Moon of Gomrath* (1963), are 'children's books' in the old-fashioned sense. The two main characters are Colin and Susan, about ten years old. They are on holiday in the English moorland (as in Enid Blyton novels). They meet a wizard, and umpteen magical creatures, and survive endless adventures. The images are bright, the language is simple, and there is always home to return to.

The children's book has traditionally been a symbol for domestication. Let the children romp around a strange landscape; give them a bit of rope; but always end the book with 'happily ever after'. It was all a bit of a trick. The 'happily ever afters' were to reassure parents, not to soothe children.

Even in the first two books, Garner began to change all that. Colin and Susan are hardly memorable characters, but at least they are not typical child heroes. They get swept along with the magic events, rather than control them. They have to make important decisions, but they are not always the 'right' decisions.

There is no 'happy ending' in *The Moon of Gomrath*. Colin and Susan think they are on the side of the goodies, but the wizard Calledin proves to be a bit of a shyster. The forces of magic are not put back in their place. 'Old Evil' is still loose at the end of the book. Most of the loose ends are not tied up.

Children's books changed altogether when Alan Garner published *Elidor* (1965), then *The Owl Service* (1968) and, most recently, *Red Shift* (1973). Children's books are now dynamic, not to be touched by those who want a 'safe read'. Writers such as William Mayne, Leon Garfield, Ursula Le Guin and Ivan Southall have also been part of the change. But somehow the change is most noticeable in Garner's books.

It is not even certain that Garner's books are any longer *for* children, let alone *about* children.

In *Elidor*, Garner narrowed the focus of action to a suburban house in England. Great magic events still take place, but they bring only trouble to the children in this story, and not much adventure.

*The Owl Service* is about 'young adults', rather than children. Alison is Roger's half-sister, and Gwyn is a Welsh kid who is involved with them. The personal relationships are real, intense, and irritating to any reader who wants only an adventure story.

*Red Shift* breaks right out of the children's category. It will be hated by many adults who control book buying for their children. Only a third of the book is actually about the young adult characters, Tom and Jan. Most of the book includes swearing, physical and verbal violence and a fair bit of talk about sex. All the old taboos have been broken. If *Red Shift* is a 'children's book' (and the publishers say it is), the label is losing its meaning.

Which is all to Alan Garner's advantage. But if they don't fit a label, what *are* Alan Garner's books?

### Mything links

'The element common to all the books', said Alan Garner during the ICA lecture, 'is my present-day function within myth. The difference between that function and what are usually called "retellings" is that the retellings are stuffed trophies on the wall, whereas I have to bring them back alive.'

I'm one of those people for whom any retelling of a myth is like watching a stuffed trophy on a wall. Long lists of ancient names (as in Garner's first two books) make me yawn.

Yet, says Garner, 'the more I learn, the more I am convinced that there are no original stories. On several occasions I have "invented" an incident, and then come across it in an obscure fragment of Hebridean lore, orally collected, and privately printed, a hundred years ago.'

But it is a modern world, isn't it? Things were quite different way back then. Even people are different now. Why bore us with old legends, Mr Garner? Where's the originality?

The originality is in the art of the books themselves, of course, not in the bits and pieces from which they are made, though many readers of Garner may be most interested in those bits and pieces.

Not that there is much artistic originality in *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* and *The Moon of Gomrath*. They fit the 'one damn thing after another' category: one adventure after another, without leaving space to think. Colin and Susan track across woods and moors, get trapped in magic-ridden houses, clamber through a particularly crazy system of underground caves, but not much is resolved.

There are some memorable images: the magic lady on the island; the flying pony that takes Susan for a ride beyond the earth; the Wild Ride; the beam of moonlight that reveals a hidden path over the hills once a year. But mainly these books form a catalogue of old legends and legendary names.

In *Elidor*, Garner's work begins to get interesting. The book begins with a fairly hackneyed adventure into a magic kingdom — but the children this time find the entrance to the magic kingdom of Elidor in a ruined church in the middle of a slum clearance in Birmingham. No more country landscapes and natural images to help along the story.

For Garner, myth is not what happens in ancient stories. It represents what happens in all periods of time. In modern England, the four treasures turn into a length of iron railing, a keystone, two splintered laths and an old, cracked cup. Buried in the garden, these objects still disurb any electrically driven machines in the vicinity. A year after the journey into Elidor, Roland looks through the keyhole in the front door — and sees an ancient eye peering back at him. The enemies of Elidor have found a magic doorway to catch up with the children. They wait in ambush — just outside the door, yet thousands of years in the past.

Still, Garner is concerned not so much with what happens to the treasures, or to Elidor, but with what happens to the children. Three of them pretend that Elidor never existed. Roland tries to solve the problem. *Elidor* is a sly protest against people who say, 'It's nothing to do with me!' Garner does not quite meet the challenge set by his ideas. He settles for magical effects — a unicorn, a breathless chase — to end the story.

*The Owl Service* won the Guardian Award and the Carnegie Medal. It's been called the most important children's book of the last twenty years — which, as always, is to put it in a pigeonhole. *The Owl Service* is

one of the best English novels in *any* category during the last twenty years. The readers have realised this already, even if the critics haven't.

*The Owl Service* is a terrifying book. No 'magic kingdoms' here. The magic is still here, but it is in the air that surrounds the characters. The magic is malevolent, inevitable and it settles down on the shoulders of the main characters like a stinking smog.

Two of the characters, Alison and Roger, are on holiday with their parents (his father, her mother) at a house in a Welsh valley. A daft Welsh gardener shuffles around the house. A sharp-tongued housekeeper reigns inside. Her son, Gwyn, forms a friendship with Roger and Alison.

A reminder of cosy British fiction for children? Of course. But nothing is cosy in this household. There are mysteries about why the English family owns the house at all. And daddy is henpecked by mummy. Gwyn has a chip on his shoulder about these visiting English upper-class slummers, and Roger treats Gwyn as a low pest. Alison wants everything to be 'nice', but all her actions increase the bitterness.

Then Things Start to Happen. The three find themselves hit by a lightning bolt of magic; they are condemned to act out an ancient Welsh legend about a wizard who built a woman from flowers, who then turned into an owl and caused the deaths of both her husband and lover. The legend begins working again when Alison finds some old plates in the attic. A pattern of owls appears on the plate. The patterns disappear, and Alison begins to make paper owls. Garner hints, but never says directly, that she is turning into a magic owl.

The transformation is only the shell of the story. The legend itself shows in the bitterness between the three characters. This scarcely disguised sexual bitterness gives the book its strength. Magic is no longer a playground for wild adventures. It's a kind of disease that comes to life in everybody, and causes only grief.

Gwyn tries to escape responsibility for his part in the triangle. He tries to leave the valley, but local villagers force him back. Roger and Alison try to ignore what is happening to them, but it happens anyway. 'There are no original stories', says Garner. What he means is that there are no people who can escape from being what they are.

*The Owl Service* is very concentrated writing, each word picked precisely. The entire book is only 156 pages long. Many pages consist of only violent conversations between characters, yet the damp atmosphere of the Welsh valley sweeps out of the pages. We are part of the legend; Garner makes this idea live in the book.

### **Inner time: *Red Shift***

I suspect that nobody knew what to make of *Red Shift* when it was published in 1973. The reviewers didn't. Some of them admitted that they were baffled. They said all the usual things: about *Red Shift* changing the face of children's writing, which was true enough. Some other authors, such as Paul Zindel, might not have succeeded without Garner's pioneering success.

It's easy to see why the reviewers scratched their heads. Make a hasty first reading of the book, as I did, and it's confusing. *Red Shift* flashes continually between three stories: the story of Tom and Jan (time: now); the story of Thomas and Margery (time: the English Civil War); the story of several Roman soldiers cut off from their legion and attempting to survive in occupied Britain (time: about two thousand years ago). The third story

is confusing because Alan Garner gives the Romans modern names (such as Macey and Magoo).

The three stories seem to have little to do with each other — except that each happens in the same area of England (on or around a castle hill called Mow Cop), and that the same axehead turns up in each story. In story 1, the Roman soldiers survive for a few months. All die except for Macey and a Celtic girl who survived a raid on a village. In story 2, the Puritan village is captured by a group of Irish Loyalist soldiers under the command of a former citizen of the village. Everybody is killed except Thomas and Margery. In story 3, Tom and Jan are separated by distance when Jan moves to the city. They meet each month until each believes each has betrayed the other. They separate permanently (or do they?).

It's the modern story that is puzzling. No sudden violence or real adventure. A boy discovers that his girlfriend once spent the weekend with another bloke. The girl discovers that her boyfriend has sold an old axehead that she cherished. A bit tame?

What does the book's title mean? It's easy to work out the scientific meaning. The red shift of the stars is the change in their colour that is observed on earth as stars rush away from each other and the earth at ever increasing speeds.

'When we look at a starry sky', writes Alan Garner, 'we see a group of configurations that seem to be equidistant from us and existing now. That is an "apparent perspective". We are looking at a complexity of times past — a sky of "it-was", all at different epochs, distances and intensities. Inner time creates similar illusions.'

'Red shift', it seems, is something that happens inside people, and between people. Three eras of history in *Red Shift*, but one humanity.

There's that axehead, for example. In Roman times, it is the means by which the group survives at all. In Roundhead times, it is a good luck charm — and a symbol of last-ditch survival. In our time, Tom and Jan find it and Tom sells it to a museum. Twentieth-century people, Garner seems to say, have forgotten their history. They've forgotten the importance of really important things.

In the two historical sections, exterior violence draws people together. In the modern section, nobody is threatened by sword-carrying soldiers. But, without exterior threat, the main characters fly apart from each other. They commit psychological violence instead.

I cannot do justice to the writing skill that Garner shows in *Red Shift*. *Every* line is important to everything else in the book. Much of the book is in dialogue. Not a word is wasted. At the beginning of the book, Jan has just returned from a holiday in Germany. By the end of the book, we know what happened to her there. So we read the beginning of the book again to find out how it affected them there. And so on, watching the pattern grow, word by word. Beware: read the last two pages carefully.

Each book that Alan Garner publishes, the pattern gets more complex. Garner is a 'wise fool', like the characters in *The Guizer*, his recent book of retold legends.

He calls himself a 'boundary-rider', finding the present boundaries of knowledge and going beyond them. We must explain ourselves to ourselves; we can explore the inner worlds through myth and story. There are stars flaming inside our heads, and Garner can draw star-maps for us.

